

The Pastor's Statement on the Use of Church Property

If you have passed by here in the last little while, you must have noticed that we reinstalled the chains to block the access to the church parking lots. We installed them last year, then we removed it hoping that people would respect the property. Unfortunately, people continued to access the church property and parking lots during moments outside of church functions and / or activities. After the frustration and anger of some people who were told to leave the property, we decided to put the chains back. Questions arise from people and from some parishioners alike: Why aren't people allowed to park here or to use the dock on the church property? It's a nice spot to rest, or to fish or to swim. Aren't churches supposed to welcome people? Isn't it for public use? I am here to make this announcement because I have the responsibility to inform my parishioners, to give them information on what's going on concerning their parish.

1- Churches are private property, not public.

Being a private property, the owner, which is us, oversees all the expenses concerning the property. Among the diocesan taxes and all the maintenance costs, one of the highest expenses we have every year is our insurance. Everything comes down to insurance policies. Our premium only covers worship and church activities. If we permit anyone to use the property for non-worship or non-church activities, any incident causing injuries outside of those two categories are fully our responsibility. If someone falls and twists their ankle for example or tumbles down and breaks their bones, we are liable. If a child drowns at our dock because they play around while they are fishing, we are liable. Being liable means that we could be responsible for any costs or damages associated with the harm caused.

You might then ask, why doesn't the church just get an insurance policy that allows people to use the property? The answer, unfortunately, is money. When I came here in 2020, our parish was already in debt. The pandemic made the situation worse. We were wondering at that time if our parish would survive or not. Our church finances have only recently improved, after the pandemic, in the last two or three years. We are not out of the woods yet, but we are in a much better situation, thanks to your generous contributions and donations, and also

the efforts that we have put together on fundraising. The sad reality is that at this time, we simply cannot afford another insurance plan, and as such, we cannot allow the public on this part of the property.

Our diocese is in a transitional period at this moment, trying to find the best way to proclaim the Good News and promote evangelization. That includes creating, reshaping merging and even closing some parishes. One of the main causes of parish closure is financial deficiency and low attendance of parishioners. For a little while, our parish was in a critical condition, since we had few people to come to church and we were struggling financially. Thankfully, we are now in a better financial position. However, further expenses could change this and could lead to the closure of our church. I, and I hope you all, do not want our church to close, and as such, this is why we simply cannot afford additional costs at this time.

2- Sanctioned events

You might have noticed that there have been some non-worship activities on this property such as group or family gatherings, baby showers and birthdays. For these events, we have only allowed them to occur on our property because they are pre planned and have their own private insurance. We are happy to welcome such events that carry their own insurance – an issue only arises when an event occurs that we do not know about, and where we don't know if sufficient insurance is in place.

3- Why we have chains and cameras

Some parishioners have mentioned that having chains blocking access to the parking lot creates an unwelcoming environment, especially for a church which is supposed to be welcoming to all. Others have asked about the cameras we have had to install. I agree with this – and ideally, there would be no need for chains, gates or cameras. The unfortunate reality is that this is the only way we have found to be successful in deterring people from the unauthorized use of our property. We have tried putting up signage, we have tried talking to people and educating the community, however, nothing else works other than physically blocking people from coming on to the property. Like many of you, I don't like this,

and I don't believe this is what a church should be either, however, this is the only way we have found is successful in preventing unauthorized use of the property.

4- Access to the cemeteries

Until now I never mentioned the cemetery because it is a totally different and separate entity. Nobody has been told to leave if they visit the cemetery. For those who do not know, the cemetery is on the far west side of the church. It has a huge parking lot in front of it that can accommodate more than 20 cars, if we use the grass. Many people have come to that part, stayed there for as long as they wanted and never been told to leave. There are few regulars even that come every day, or every other day. We know them and no one ever bothered them. There is no grave to visit behind the church or near the dock.

5- Moving forward

My role as pastor here is to look after the spiritual needs of my parishioners first. Also, being the first administrator of this parish, I have the responsibility to look after the wellbeing of our property. My main goal is to protect the existence of our parish and to make it a decent place of worship and a space to help people to come closer to our Lord. Our parish is growing now, not only spiritually but also in number, and I have no desire to disrupt that growth. As such, we must continue to prevent any cause of financial loss to our parish that may lead us to closure once we will not be able to take care of our bills. One day, we may change our policies when we return to be a strong parish, with lots of parishioners and money and can spend on higher premium and can take financial hit. But for now, we must maintain the measures we have taken for the betterment of this place of prayer and worship.

The church is always a welcoming space. We do not discriminate based on age, race, gender, or any other factor. Its doors open widely early on Sunday morning and on Saturday afternoon to welcome everyone. At any time, if someone wants to have access to have quiet time with the Lord in front of the Blessed Sacrament,

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it is also opened to them. But as a place of worship, or any private owned property for that matter, it requires respect and protection so that it can continue to operate and to attain its purpose: worship.

I hope this will give a bit of information to you, parishioners. It may not make everyone happy. We all know it is hard and nearly impossible to please everyone. But I make this announcement to inform you of the things that are going on in your parish and why we have taken these measures.

Thank you.

F. Hasina